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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 000949

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN'S MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ASKS  
FOR "UNDERSTANDING" ON JACKSON-VANIK

REF: A. ASHGABAT 947  
[B. ASHGABAT 884](#)  
[C. ASHGABAT 942](#)  
[D. ASHGABAT 912](#)

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Jennifer L. Brush for reasons 1.  
4 (B) and (D).

Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) After almost a month's wait, Turkmenistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rashit Meredov, met with Charge and told her there was no such thing as a "black list" of citizens not allowed to travel out of the country. Instead, he said, there were a number of people "temporarily prevented" from leaving, based on sound legal cause. Meredov called the three specific cases Charge raised "artificial." Charge said she doubted any of these arguments would be well-received in Washington and that the government needed to do more to address transparency of the "list" or "temporary prevention" cases or whatever Meredov wanted to call it. In response to Meredov's saying he probably would go to New York for the UNGA and that he would agree to meet with SCA Assistant Secretary Boucher, Charge said we needed to know Meredov's

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plans ASAP in order to request the meeting. Charge urged Meredov to be more forthcoming both on transparency and resolution of individual cases, and said that Assistant Secretary Boucher likely would raise Jackson-Vanik with the

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minister in New York. Meredov absolutely refused to discuss the Maral Yklymova case and scolded Charge for raising it, saying "You know how sensitive that case is and you know we will never change our position." As Charge was leaving the office, Meredov said, "Not extending the Jackson-Vanik waiver would be a very serious blow to our relations; we need to find a solution." Charge agreed. End Summary.

Is It Too Cold in Here?  
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[1](#)2. (C) As outlined Ref A, Charge pulled aside Foreign Minister Meredov at the Tajikistan National Day celebration on September 7, to say she had recommended to the Department to consider not extending the Jackson-Vanik waiver because the government had failed to address making criteria for inclusion and removal of one's name from the travel-abroad "black list" more transparent, had made no progress on

resolving individual cases and even had refused to engage with the USG on this issue, beginning with the minister's refusal to meet with visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary Mann (Ref B) during the latter's August 14-15 visit to Ashgabat. Meredov ticked off all the various delegations that had visited Ashgabat during August and September, and then agreed to meet Charge the next morning.

¶3. (C) Greeting Charge in his office on September 8, Meredov squinted at the air conditioner, saying "Is it too cold in here for you?" Charge responded that she certainly had been feeling a chill in the bilateral relations, and said she found it incomprehensible that the minister had not met with Mann, that he had not responded to three weeks of requests for a meeting, and that he even had failed to meet with the P-3 (United States, UK and France) to receive the Central Asian Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone demarche (Ref C). Meredov added the host of Ruhnama anniversary occasions he had to attend to the list of visiting delegations and noted he had not seen the Charge at the openings for the Armenian or Hindi translations of Ruhnamas I and II (the French and Malay translations are being launched September 8-9). After listening to almost 30 minutes of Meredov trying to convince her of the Ruhnama's claims that both sheep and ceramics had originated in pre-historic Turkmenistan (in addition to dogs, horses and wheat), Charge said that, though Turkmenistan's history truly was fascinating, as an American, she was more oriented toward the future, and that a continued lack of freedom of movement in modern Turkmenistan currently was under review in Washington.

Respect Our Laws  
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¶4. (C) In response to Charge's comment that the MFA's diplomatic note claiming there was no "black list" preventing people from traveling from Turkmenistan only made matters worse, Meredov launched a legal defense of the claim, saying there was no "list," but there were people who according to

Turkmenistan law were "temporarily prevented" from leaving the country. Meredov insisted similar procedures existed all over the world, and said he was "offended" by USG insistence that a list existed. "Look what just happened in London," Meredov said, "you don't think the police should have prevented those terrorists from boarding the flight?" Charge replied that she had seen the list with her own eyes and that the individual cases embassy had raised -- a local civil society representative going to Moscow for training, an embassy local employee going to a State Department course in Vienna, and a university student returning to her studies in China -- had no intention of blowing up a plane. Meredov insisted these three cases were "artificial" and said that Charge did not have the whole story; all of these people were denied travel for good reason.

¶5. (C) When Charge asked about procedures for getting one's name removed from the list or for clearing one's name, Meredov said he did not know. After Charge asked if there was any place for an average citizen to go find out whether his/her name was on the list, Meredov said, "don't be ridiculous; everyone can travel if he/she is innocent; of course there is no place to check."

Meeting at UNGA?  
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¶6. (C) After the third iteration of the "legal basis" for "temporary prevention," Charge told Meredov this simply was not a convincing enough argument for the Department to extend the waiver. She said that Meredov could have an opportunity to explain Turkmenistan's position in New York if Meredov was attending the UN General Assembly, and said that the embassy had recommended that Assistant Secretary Boucher meet with him there. Meredov said he "probably" would attend, but that the decision was not final. Charge urged Meredov to provide his travel details early next week, as Assistant Secretary Boucher's schedule already was quite full.

Yklymova  
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¶17. (C) Charge suggested that letting a high-profile case like Maral Yklymova (Ref D) go would be useful for Turkmenistan, and that keeping her indefinitely under house arrest achieved no purpose. Visibly angry, Meredov scolded Charge, saying "You know how sensitive that case is; we will never change our position on that."

Serious Blow  
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¶18. (C) As Charge was leaving, Meredov said, "You know, if you don't extend the waiver, this would be a serious blow to our relations." Charge agreed, saying this would be unfortunate, but that Meredov's legal defense was not enough to justify extension of the waiver. She urged him both to consider addressing the transparency of the criteria and procedures for entry to/removal from the list, and resolution of individual cases. Meredov said that both sides needed to think hard about Jackson-Vanik and "solve it."

Comment  
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¶19. (C) This meeting was a disappointment. Still, given the risk to all of our programs here should we decide not to extend the waiver, embassy recommends giving Meredov a couple more weeks to address transparency and reconsider the individual cases the embassy has raised. End Comment.  
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